

Fox Producer Says She Was Set Up in Dominion Case

The producer, Abby Grossberg, said in a pair of lawsuits that the effort to place blame on her and Maria Bartiromo, the Fox Business host, was rooted in rampant misogyny and discrimination at the company.

By Nicholas Confessore and Katie Robertson

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A Fox News producer who has worked with the hosts Maria Bartiromo and Tucker Carlson filed lawsuits against the company in New York and Delaware on Monday, accusing Fox lawyers of coercing her into giving misleading testimony in the continuing legal battle around the network's coverage of unfounded claims about election fraud.

The producer, Abby Grossberg, said Fox lawyers had tried to position her and Ms. Bartiromo to take the blame for Fox's repeated airing of conspiracy theories about Dominion Voting Systems and its supposed role in manipulating the results of the 2020 presidential election. Dominion has filed a \$1.6 billion defamation suit against Fox. Ms. Grossberg said the effort to place blame on her and Ms. Bartiromo was rooted in rampant misogyny and discrimination at the network.

The new lawsuits, coupled with revelations from the Dominion legal fight, shed light on the rivalries and turf battles that raged at Fox News in the wake of the 2020 election, as network executives fought to hold on to viewers furious at the top-rated network for accurately reporting on President Donald J. Trump's defeat in Arizona, a crucial swing state.

The lawsuits also include details about Ms. Grossberg's work life at Fox and on Mr. Carlson's show. Ms. Grossberg says she and other women endured frank and open sexism from co-workers and superiors at the network, which has been dogged for years by lawsuits and allegations about sexual harassment by Fox executives and stars.

The network's disregard for women, Ms. Grossberg alleged, left her and Ms. Bartiromo understaffed — stretched too thin to properly vet the truthfulness of claims made against Dominion on the air. At times, Ms. Grossberg said, she was the only full-time employee dedicated solely to Ms. Bartiromo's Sunday-morning show.

In her complaints, Ms. Grossberg accuses lawyers for Fox News of coaching her in "a coercive and intimidating manner" before her September deposition in the Dominion case. The lawyers, she said, gave her the impression that she had to avoid mentioning prominent male executives and on-air talent to protect them from any blame while putting her own reputation at risk.

"That's what the culture is there," Ms. Grossberg said in an interview on Monday evening. "They don't respect or value women."

On Monday afternoon, Fox filed its own suit against Ms. Grossberg, seeking to enjoin her from filing claims that would shed light on her discussions with the company's lawyers. A judge has not yet ruled on Fox's suit. Later on Monday, according to her lawyer, Parisi G. Filippatos, Fox also placed Ms. Grossberg on forced administrative leave.

Ms. Grossberg's lawsuits were filed in the Southern District of New York and in Superior Court in Delaware, where a pretrial hearing in the Dominion defamation lawsuit is scheduled for Tuesday.

In a statement, a Fox spokeswoman said: "Fox News Media engaged an independent outside counsel to immediately investigate the concerns raised by Ms. Grossberg, which were made following a critical performance review. We will vigorously defend these claims."

According to the lawsuits filed by Ms. Grossberg, Fox superiors called Ms. Bartiromo a "crazy bitch" who was "menopausal" and asked Ms. Grossberg to cut the host out of coverage discussions.

Last year, she began working as a senior booking producer at "Tucker Carlson Tonight." On her first full day, according to the lawsuit, Ms. Grossberg discovered that the show's Manhattan work space was decorated with large pictures of Representative Nancy Pelosi of California, then the House speaker, wearing a plunging swimsuit.

The next day, Justin Wells, Mr. Carlson's top producer, called Ms. Grossberg into his office, she said, to ask whether Ms. Bartiromo was having a sexual relationship with the House Republican leader, Kevin McCarthy.

Mr. Carlson's staff joked about Jews and freely deployed a vulgar term for women, according to the complaint.

Later that fall, it said, before an appearance on the show by Tudor Dixon, the Republican candidate for Michigan governor, Mr. Carlson's staff held a mock debate about whether they would prefer to have sex with Ms. Dixon or her Democratic opponent, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer.

After Ms. Grossberg complained about harassment from two male producers on the show, she was pulled into a meeting with human resources and told that she was not performing her duties, according to the complaint.

Some text exchanges between Ms. Grossberg and Ms. Bartiromo were released as part of court filings in the Dominion lawsuit. In one instance, Ms. Bartiromo asked Ms. Grossberg if she should have pushed Mr. Trump in an interview on whether he would peacefully transition from the presidency. Ms. Grossberg replied: “To be honest, our audience doesn’t want to hear about a peaceful transition.”

During her deposition, Ms. Grossberg was asked if she cared whether claims made on Ms. Bartiromo’s show were true or false. According to the transcript, Ms. Grossberg answered: “No. Because we didn’t know if they were true or false at that time.” When asked if she felt it was important to correct a false claim made on the air, Ms. Grossberg answered: “No.”

In her lawsuits, Ms. Grossberg said she would have answered those questions differently but had been “coached by and intimidated by” Fox’s lawyers.

Ms. Grossberg claimed that Fox lawyers pressured her to downplay a text exchange between her and David Clark, then the senior vice president of weekend news, regarding a segment with Rudolph W. Giuliani, a lawyer for Mr. Trump. Mr. Clark texted: “There will be no ‘fact checking’ today.”

Ms. Grossberg said she had understood Mr. Clark to mean that Ms. Bartiromo was not to push back against Mr. Giuliani’s false claims of widespread election fraud. An updated version of the filing stated that Ms. Grossberg believed Mr. Clark to mean that no one, including him, would step in to fact check the show.

The Fox spokeswoman said Mr. Clark had been referring instead to a practice in which Fox shows sometimes criticized material that had aired elsewhere on the network.

Cited in Grossberg v Fox
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